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Foreign Language Classroom Interaction: Does it Promote Communicative Skills?

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Abstract: Classroom interaction is an essential element in developing communicative skills. In a foreign language context like Burkina Faso, the classroom appears as the only setting that provides an opportunity for English language learners to practice their communicative skills. In the classroom, teachers create opportunities for interaction between students and their peers, between students and teachers, and between students and teaching materials. Although those interactions are expected to promote English language acquisition, they sometimes seem insufficient. In this paper, the author examines the interactions between teachers and their students. The author seeks to understand the extent to which they can be conducive to communicative skills. The methodology used to collect this data is qualitative, mostly based on classroom observation and interviews. The participants are high school classroom teachers and their students. The results unveiled that the nature of the interaction was determined by the control and elicitation techniques used by teachers which often limited the opportunities to communicate.

Keywords: *Classroom interaction, language acquisition, communicative skills, English as foreign language.*

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Introduction

An analysis of classroom interactions is essential in exploring the development of communicative skills. Classroom interaction is a crucial element in developing communicative skills because the classroom is usually the only setting in which learners are exposed to the target language. The nature of classroom interaction often determines the extent to which learners can or cannot acquire the language. In Burkina Faso, policymakers have adopted communicative competence as the goal of foreign language teaching and new syllabi have been designed and implemented to help teachers promote the development of communicative competence since 2010. However, despite the implementation of the new syllabi, it seems that students are still lagging behind in expressing simple ideas in English. Many studies have examined classroom interactions in a foreign language context (Castro, 2009; Nabei & Swain, 2002; Seedhouse, 1996). Most of those studies explored issues regarding Latin American, Asian, European and Northern African realities, while the francophone African context is under-represented. This study aims at positioning francophone Africa in the literature through an analysis of issues relevant to interactions in English as a foreign language classroom. This qualitative study investigates classroom interactions in EFL classrooms in Burkina Faso, a Francophone West African country. The objectives of the study are to understand classroom interaction and to understand the extent to which it promotes communicative skills. It seeks to explore the following research questions: What is the nature of classroom interactions observed in this study? To what extent do classroom interactions promote the development of communicative skills? The participants of the study are high school level students with their EFL teachers. Data collection methods are classroom observations, interviews and informal conversations

A sociocultural perspective of classroom interaction

In this section, we examine the literature on the sociocultural perspective of classroom interaction, which according to Vygotsky (1978), is negotiated between individuals. In his understanding, the notion of 'social' is fundamental in the teaching-learning environment (Mercer, 1994). Mercer (2004) argues that thinking, learning, and development take

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account of the social and communicative nature of human life. He adds that "the nature of human activity is that knowledge is shared, and people jointly construct understandings of shared experience" (p. 138). That view of shared construction of knowledge is a dialogic process in which students work with teachers within the social and cultural settings of schools (Mercer 2004, p. 139). Similarly, Jarramilo (1996) argues that the "surrounding social nature of learning encompasses the students' interaction with peers and with instructors" (p. 137). The author adds that in the classroom setting, students learn when they interact with their peers, their teachers, and their contextual settings. It also has to be noted that the quality of educational dialogue determines the level of educational success and failure.

In this study, we are mostly interested in the interaction between students and their teachers within the social and cultural setting of schools in Burkina Faso. We rely on Mercer's (2004) view of the dialogic process which implies interaction and interthink between teachers and learners involved in the learning process. Jarramilo (1996) argues that the learner must be an active participant in his learning and writes that the classroom should be "an egalitarian setting, rather than teacher-centered" (p. 136).

In his article about classroom interaction, Seedhouse (1996) defines "classroom communication as a sociolinguistic variety or institutional discourse" (p.24). He opposes classroom communication to a natural conversation and argues that the former cannot replicate the latter as classroom conversation has institutional purposes. He writes that the following conditions have to be met if we have to consider classroom interaction as a natural conversation

"The setting must not be an institutional one; turn-taking and participation rights in conversations must be unrestricted; responsibility for managing and monitoring the progress of discourse much be shared by all participants; conversations are open-ended, and participants jointly negotiate the topic." (p. 18)

Besides, Walsh (2011) unveils four features of classroom discourse which are control of the interaction, speech modification, elicitation techniques, and repair. We are here interested in the control of interaction and elicitation techniques.

Teacher control in the EFL (English as a foreign language) classroom has received significant attention in the literature (Hu & Zhang, 2020). A teacher is perceived as playing "a vital role to play in understanding, establishing, and maintaining patterns of communication which will facilitate SLA [second language acquisition]" (Walsh, 2002, p. 4). In a study about teacher autonomy and learner autonomy, Hui (2010) argues that teachers should help their learners take control of their learning by providing them with the necessary help. He views learner as autonomy compulsory for language acquisition and believes that it will only be a reality if the teacher provides a positive learning environment in which learners will break educational barriers to language acquisition.

Another discussion used to analyze the finding of this study is the Flanders system of interaction analysis as revealed in Moskowitz (1967). Amatori (2015) describes the Flanders system as "an observational tool used to classify the verbal behavior of teachers and pupils as they interact in the classroom" (p. 44). Moskowitz notes that the Flanders system describes teacher behavior, student behavior, and 'silence or confusion'. The categories communicating teacher behavior refer to the extent to which teachers influence student motivation and participation in the classroom. They are divided into direct and indirect influences. While in the indirect influence the teacher "accepts feelings of pupils, praises or encourages them, accepts their ideas and asks questions", in the direct one, the teacher "gives information, gives directions, criticizes or justifies authority". As for the categories discussing student behavior, it refers to the predictability or not of students' response (Maoskowitz, 1967, p. 2).

Aisyah (2016) also discusses the Flaunder's categorization and points out teacher talk as essential for language learning and acquisition. According to the author, teachers' talk is an essential source of input in foreign language learning, and teachers ought to acknowledge the categories they use in the classroom if they have to develop better teaching and learning processes.

On a different note, Rido et al. (2014) identify four types of interaction strategies which are "control of interaction or interaction management, elicitation or questioning, speech modification or feedback, and repairing or error treatment strategies" (p. 422). Hence, Walsh (2002) unveils that+ the teacher often controls the classroom with his use of language and determines the extent to which learners acquire the target language. Walsh mentions teacher actions that obstruct language acquisition and points to turn completion (when teacher fills the gap during student talk to advance discussion) the IRF (Initiation, Response and Feedback) turn-taking technique and teacher interruptions.

As for elicitation techniques, Walsh (2011) reports that they point to the way teachers control classroom discourse through questions. Questioning is a key element in language acquisition according to Richard and Lockhart (1996). They argue that teachers' questions can motivate students' participation and classroom interaction. Al-Zahrani and Al-Bargi (2017) make a similar comment and point out that "through questions, teachers encourage students' talk and facilitate verbal interaction in the classroom, whether students' production is a single word, a sentence or longer utterances in conversational patterns" (p. 138). Xin et al. (2011) identify two types of questions observable in the classroom. The first type of question is display questions and the second is referential questions. Qashoa (2013)

discusses that the answer to a display question is already known to the teacher. The focus of display questions is on the “recollection of previously presented information” (Xin et al., 2011, p. 754).

Referential questions “refer to the questions that teachers do not know the answers to, and require long syntactically complicated answers containing interpretation, elaboration, giving an opinion and subjective information” (Qashoa, 2013, p. 54). In the same vein, Xin et al., (2011) note that this kind of question provides students with an opportunity to “think actively and provide their own information and ideas based on their own knowledge and experience rather than recollect the previously presented information” (p. 754). However, Quashoa (2013) states that the use of referential questions is often limited by the proficiency level of both students and teaching techniques. In his study about questioning techniques, he adds that students’ answers are longer controlled when the questions are referential questions and concluded that

the overuse of [referential] questions in L2 classes might affect positively students’ language ability by giving them grammatical structures that seek out new information and then lead them to more communicative interaction” (p. 60)

Display questions or closed questions on the other hand prevent learners from expressing their viewpoints (Al-Zahrani & Al-Bargi, 2017). The learners are often required to discuss ideas that are already expressed. Those ideas are often used to check students’ understanding (Vebriyanto, 2015). Besides, Farahian and Rezaee (2012) note that teachers also often resort to display or closed questions because they are either inexperienced or have a low level of mastery of the language or because of the low-level fluency of the students. The authors, however, unveil the need to resort mostly to referential questions to help students develop fluency in English.

Speech modification and feedback strategies are pointed out by Rido et al. (2014) as a strategy allowing meaning negotiation in classroom interaction. Meaning negotiation assumes the development of collaborative strategies between teachers and students (Bature & Atweh, 2019). It implies an increase in student participation which facilitates language acquisition (Champakaew & Pencingkarn, 2014). Champakaew and Pencingkarn identify five negotiation of meaning strategies that are comprehension check, confirmation check, clarification request, asking for help, and repetition.

The last type of interaction strategy discussed by Rido et al. (2014) is error treatment strategies which are strategies used by teachers to correct their students’ errors. Those strategies include repeating students’ answers with changes, asking students to correct their errors, interrupting students to correct their errors, revealing students’ errors, and being critical of them (Rido et al., 2014; Xuerong, 2012).

Methodology

Study design

This study is a qualitative one in that it takes place in the natural setting in which the events occur. It consists of collecting data in the “field at the site where the participants experience the issue or problem under study” (Creswell, 2009; p. 175). In the case of our study, the classroom is the natural setting in which interactions occur between students and between students and teachers. The researcher examined the nature of the social interactions between the different parties involved in the learning community that is the classroom. Hence, the study investigates linguistic patterns to help [researchers] gain greater social understandings” (Schilling, 2013) of the phenomenon.

Research context

English as a foreign language (EFL) teaching in Burkina Faso mostly happens in middle and high schools with five hours a week the first two years and three hours the remaining seven years. High school starts in 10th grade. At that level, students choose a domain of specialization and are divided into the classrooms depending on their specialization. Those specializations are literature, hard science, or technical science. EFL teaching in high school classes then focuses on the options chosen by the students. The classrooms involved in this study are both literature and hard science focus: one 10th grade and one 11th grade with a literature focus and one 11th grade with a hard science focus. The teachers focus either on literary texts or on scientific texts depending on the specialization of the class.

Research site and participants

The research site and participants of this study constitute a speech community because they are involved in interactions that include strong ties enabled by their learning goals and purposes. The purpose of this study is to focus on how social “categories are constructed and reconstructed in social interaction” (Schilling, 2013, p.27)

The study took place in three different high schools in Ouagadougou, the capital city of Burkina Faso. The high schools involved are private and the students enrolled in them are mostly from a middle-class background. The schools are competitive as they mostly recruit students based on tests. Only the students who succeed at the test get to attend those schools. As for the teachers, they work part-time in those institutions. Two of them are public school teachers

who work part-time in those schools and the last one has no specific institutional attachment. The two public school teachers received a teaching certificate from the local teacher education institution.

This study included three English as a foreign language teachers (EFL) with Mr. Z in 11th grade, Mrs. P in 10th grade, and Mr. O in 11th grade. Mr. O and Mrs. P had been teaching for at least five years while Mr. Z was only in his second year of teaching at the time of data collection. They all have a bachelor's degree with English major but only Mr. O Mrs P attended a teacher training college. As for Mr. Z, he came to teaching right after college graduation. They have all been teaching middle and high school classrooms, but this study only explored the high school level classrooms.

Each teacher was observed once a week for a period of nine months. Each class had 60 students except for the 11th grade of Mr. O that had 40 students. The choice of the teacher participants was made based on the availability and willingness of teachers to participate.

Data collection methods

The methods used to collect data were mostly classroom observations, interviews with teachers, and informal conversations with students. During classroom observations, the researcher took notes 'of the behavior and activities of individuals at the research site' (Creswell, 2009, p. 181). The researcher was a non-participant observer and used an observational protocol to record demographic information, descriptive notes, and reflective notes. Besides the observation protocol that recorded classroom observations, the researcher recorded classroom interactions with an audio recorder. Both the field notes and the audio recorder provided insights into the nature of the interaction between the different participants in classroom activities.

Another method of data collection used in this study was teacher interviews. Qualitative interviews for this study were face to face with the individual teacher participants. Each teacher was interviewed once for 30 to 45 minutes. The interview questions were open-ended questions that aimed at allowing the participants to freely and openly discuss their viewpoints. The interviews were recorded and later transcribed for data analysis.

As for informal conversations, they often took place at the end of class when the researcher engaged in discussions with the students about some striking elements of the observation. They were often initiated by the researcher and lasted 5 to 10 minutes.

Data analysis

Data analysis for this study was inductive and based on thematic units of analysis and sociolinguistic units of analysis. The thematic analysis consisted of reading through the data a few times and identifying emerging and recurrent themes. The recurrent themes were those that were repetitive throughout the data collected. Throughout the nine months that data collection lasted, the researcher collected data in three different sites using different methods of data collection. Reading through those data allowed the researcher to identify the themes that were repetitive. Those repetitive themes were the ones used for data analysis. As for sociolinguistic units of analysis, it consisted of paying close attention to issues regarding turn-taking and questioning techniques. The themes that were identified and used in this study were teacher control, questioning types, student contributions, and prompts. The author used the sociocultural view of classroom interaction to make sense of the data and understand the nature of the interaction in the classroom.

Findings

The findings of this study are presented through short conversations featuring interactions between teachers and their students. The conversations unveil the nature of the interaction between the participants during classroom activities. For this paper, the author emphasized three conversations to reveal the extent to which classroom interactions can foster communication skills. The analysis relies mostly on the Flanders system of interaction and the interaction strategies discussed by Rido et al. (2014).

The first conversation was between Mr. O and his students about a general rule of how to build adverbs. The teacher gave the students the example of the adverb *slowly* and explained that it is formed by adding *ly* to the adjective *slow*. Then he asked the students if the same thing applied to the word *basic*.

Extract of Mr. O's class

T *If you take the word basic, can you add -ly to get basically?*

S *No*

T *No? How do you get the adverb of 'basic'?*

No answer

T *how about 'economic'?*

No answer

T 'economically', right?

S Yes

T then, you add -ally to get 'basically', 'economically'. But will you say 'publically'?

S No

T Ok. Who can give me the adverb of 'good'?

No answer.

The next interaction is a discussion between Mrs. P and her students correcting an assignment on the passive voice.

T Who can give the structure of the passive voice?

S1 O + to be + past participle

T past participle of what?

S of the verb

The teacher writes the structure on the board

T what is the tense of to be?

S the tense of to be is the tense of the verb in the active voice

T Good! From now on, if I see someone use the active verb to be passive, he will be punished

The teacher asked a student to clean the board and write the sentences below to be put in the passive voice

- 1- I have cooked green beans
- 2- We sing the national anthem every morning
- 3- She was reading a novel

Teacher read the sentence aloud and asked a student to write the first sentence in the passive voice

The student wrote 'a green...'

T it's not a green... but green...

The student removed the 'a'

Student wrote 'green beans are cooked by me'

T do you agree?

S no

T What is the tense of to be here?

S3 past perfect

T the structure is ...

Another student came to the board, cleaned it, and wrote: 'green beans has...

T plus?

S4 been

The student on the board added, 'been cooked by me.'

The interaction between Mrs. P and Mr. O and their students referred to Rido et al.'s (2014) types of interaction strategies. Both teachers controlled classroom interactions through their lines of questioning. They controlled and guided the learners towards the expected answers. Besides, when Mr. O asked 'if you take the word basic, can you add -ly to get basically?' or when Mrs. P asked 'what is the tense of to be here?' or 'past participle of what?' they were not only controlling the class, they were also bringing up elicitation that could help learners towards the expected answer and providing a negotiation of meaning. They both utilized strategies in correcting students' errors. Mrs. P, for example, revealed the student's error in the passive voice when she asked 'do you agree?' 'What is the tense of to be here?' 'The structure is...'. All of these questions enlightened the learners on the mistake that was made and allowed them to self-correct.

The last excerpt featured a conversation between Mr. Z and his students about international women's day. The class took place on March 9th, a day after the international women's day. Mr. Z started the class by asking his students

Extract of MR Z's class

T What does the international women's day represent for you? Is it a good thing to have a special day for women?

S1 Women's day represents the day of right.

T day of...?

S1 day of right of the women

T what do you mean by 'the day of right'?

S1 it is the day...

T Can you clarify your idea? Is it the day they come to town to claim their rights?

Student 1 nodded.

S2 personally, I think it is a good day for women, but the problem might be the way they celebrate women

S3 according to me, the international women's day is a good thing because it permits women to have the same right to men. But on the other hand, it's not good because some women and men are the same

Laughs in the classroom

T if women and men are the same, why claim women's rights?

S2 (a boy) if you claim to be equal to men, there is a problem

S3 (a boy) I think it is a problem because it's discrimination for men.

S4 (a girl) it permits to express ideas

T You don't do that every day?

No response.

As a follow up to the classroom observation sessions, the researcher interviewed the teachers and had informal conversations with a few students. During the interviews, the teachers reported having difficulties with student participation. Mr. O stated that his students were often very quiet and did not participate in his class. He said "I don't know what to do with them. They simply don't want to participate. I try to bring up different types of activities but they are often quiet. I used to give discussion topics in class to motivate their participation, but at the end of the day, only two or three of them will take part in the discussion. I finally gave up and do a lot more grammar." Mr. Z had a similar comment and pointed out that only a few of his students participated in classroom activities. He argued that the majority of the students did not say a word in class and added "it is true that when we discuss in class, more students are involved. They are active if the topic of the discussion is of interest to them. But even that, it's only a few of them who will participate." When the researcher inquired about the reason for the students' passivity, Mr. O mentioned that his students were lazy and did not want to make any effort. As for Mr. Z, he pointed out that "you know, students don't generally like English. They are obliged to be there and do so to respect authority but are not willing to make much effort to improve their level. You only hear them when the topics of the discussion are appealing to them. But we can't always deal with topics they want all the time." As for the students, they reported not understanding what happens in English classrooms. One of them stated, "Mr. O is always speaking English and I cannot understand what he says" (translated from French). Another one added "my teacher often has interesting topics but I do not participate because I cannot speak English" (translated from French). A third student noted that "it is difficult to participate if the teacher does not accept what people say. He is always right and no one else and I don't agree with that. Besides, my teacher sometimes makes fun of students' answers. I don't want my friends to mock me because I don't speak well. So, I prefer to stay quiet" (translated from French). This last statement was discussed by all the students involved in the informal conversations. The second student mentioned also pointed out that "my teacher always expects specific answers to his questions but when you are in a discussion, he needs to accept all the answers even if he does not agree with them" (translated from French).

An analysis of the teachers' behavior in the excerpts revealed that they had little indirect influence over the students. They showed neither acceptance of students' feelings, praise or encouragement, nor acceptance and use of students' ideas. The only category of indirect influence perceptible in the conversations was asking questions. However, although Mr. O asked questions in the first conversation and the students responded, there was no praise or encouragement or even clear acceptance of ideas.

The excerpts did reveal the direct influence of the teachers over students' learning. In the first one, for instance, the questions attempted to direct the learners to the rule about the formation of adverbs. The teacher gave them the

information and also guided them throughout the conversation. The same argument held for Mr. Z's class in which the teacher gave information about the topic of the discussion and directed the students towards the types of expected answers. He also seemed to criticize or justify authority through the following question, 'if women and men are the same, why claim women's right?' As for students' behavior, they appeared to be conditioned by teachers' behavior. Students' answers were predictable in the excerpts due to the type of questions initiated by the teacher.

In her discussion of the Flanders' interactional analysis, Amatari (2015) argued that direct influence reduced the freedom of the learner. His/her "choice, consciously or unconsciously depended upon many factors among which his perceptions of the situations and the goals of the particular learning situation" (Amatari, 2015; p. 45). Such a reduction of freedom increased the control of teachers since they determined some of the factors that limited the freedom of the learner.

Besides, the excerpts disclosed that classroom conversations were controlled by teachers. Mrs. P. noted that as the classroom teacher, she had the responsibility of deciding on the theme of the discussion. Usually, the theme was dictated by the progression of the syllabus. The same assertion was made by Mr. O and Mr. Z. who reported always choosing the topics of the discussion. Mr. O added that "if you allow the students to have a say in the topic, you will not make any progress and the syllabus will not be addressed". Considering this discussion, it seemed that classroom discussion had an institutional purpose as argued by Seedhouse (1996). The goal of the teachers were to meet the requirement of the school institution which was to follow a prescribed syllabus.

The control of the classroom could also be noted through questioning. Both excerpts reported that teachers asked questions and students responded. The nature of the questions determined the type of answers that were provided by students. In Mr. O's classroom conversation, for example, the questions were mostly closed questions and requested single word answers. Mr. O related the type of questions to the nature of the lesson. According to him, it was a grammar lesson, not a discussion one. The main objective was for the students to apply the rules of adverb formation. Mr. Z and Mrs. P made similar comments and reported that grammar-based lessons could hardly call for back and forth conversations between teachers and students. Although the purpose of the questions used in Mr. O's classroom was to check the knowledge of the learners, it seemed obvious that the learners' answers did not reflect their understanding of adverb formation. The nature of the questions scarcely called for any other form of interaction. It did not request any language use and could hardly promote fluency development (Farahian & Rezaee, 2012).

As for discussion-led classes, they were, according to teachers, conducive to open-ended conversations between teachers and their students. It was the case of Mr. Z.'s discussion with his students on International women's day. According to Mr. Z. "the class was very lively when the topic of the discussion was of interest to the students." He noted that his students were very much interested in the topic of the day because the international women's day had always been subject to controversial debates between men and women. It is indeed to be noted that even though the teacher was still in control of classroom discussions, the students were more expressive, providing longer answers to questions. Besides, there were sporadic attempts of the teacher to prompt students' answers. Most of the answers provided by students called for prompts that could have led to more discussions, but they remained unexplored. One such example was when student 2 said: "I think it is a good day for women, but the problem might be the way they celebrate women." Prompting student 2 to elucidate his idea could have been an opportunity for a longer and open-ended discussion that would probably promote language acquisition (Al-Zahrani & Al-Bargi, 2017).

The lack of prompt was also relevant to the discussion in Mr. O.'s class. To his very first question "If you take the word *basic*, can you add *-ly* to get *basically*?" *the students responded "no"*. That could have been a prompting opportunity about the reason why 'basic' + 'ly' cannot form an adverb. Such a prompt would probably have helped not only the understanding of the students on adverb formation, but also their oral abilities.

Discussion

Taking a sociocultural perspective, the classrooms seemed to be a social and cultural environment that favored communication and interaction between both teachers and their students. They seemed to have a shared understanding of their learning environments. Following Mercer's (2004) argument, Mr. Z and his students had a shared understanding of the topic of the day. Although they did not necessarily share the same point of view about the international women's day, they did work together through classroom interaction to discuss the topic of the day. That collaboration implied interaction between peers and between students and their teachers (Jaramillo, 1996). It prompted students to use their vocabulary to express their ideas and promoted language learning (Jaramillo, 1996). There seemed to be a dialogic process in Mr. Z's classroom in which there were interactions and interthink between the teacher and his learners (Mercer, 2004).

That interaction and interthink was promoted by the apparent active participation of the learners. If that active participation was perceptible in Mr. Z's class, Mrs. P and Mr. O's classes were mostly teacher-centered and less prone to classroom interaction. The dialogic process was almost invisible in Mr. O's class as there was barely any participation of the students. It was rather in process in which the students merely accepted what they were told with no attempt to participate.

The difference of interaction between Mr. O's class and that of Mr. Z could naturally be attributed to the nature of the class but mostly to the line of questioning. The teachers used different types of questions in their classrooms. While Mr. O used closed questions with yes/no answers, Mr. Z resorted to open-ended questions and Mrs. P used interaction strategies as discussed by Rido et al. (2014). Mr. O's questions restricted the students to single word answers that did not request any form of interaction between peers or between teachers and learners. As for Mr. Z's questions, they invited the learners to think and express their ideas about a specific topic even if the teacher often failed to prompt the students' answers. The dialogic interaction between teachers and learners was hence limited in its ability to promote communicative skills in the classes. If Mr. Z made some efforts, he limited the potential of his learners, denying them the possibility to push their discussions further.

Conclusion

This paper examined the nature of classroom interactions. The data revealed that classroom interactions were guided by teacher control and elicitation techniques through a very limited line of questioning. Teachers used closed questions, limiting classroom interactions to single word answers. They were teacher-centered and hardly promoted any form of interaction between students and their teacher. As for the second type of questions, referential questions, they were open-ended and called for more discussions. Unfortunately, the teacher did not push the students beyond their comfort zone. That constituted an impediment to the development of communicative fluency skills in his classroom.

Besides, following the Flanders' system of interaction, it appeared that teachers had a direct influence over their students. That direct influence consisting of giving information, giving directions, and criticizing, was not a motivation factor to language acquisition. It reinforced the teachers' control while limiting classroom interaction. Similarly, an analysis of the interactional strategies unveiled teachers' control of classroom interaction and elicitation techniques that did not promote student participation, even though there were instances of negotiation of meaning and error correction. It might hence be worthwhile for classroom teachers to reconsider their systems and strategies of interaction if they intend to cultivate the development of communicative skills in the classroom.

Suggestions

A couple of suggestions can be drawn from the discussion above. The first one concerned teacher control. Teachers seemed to control the discussions in the classroom. As the teachers have reported, the themes were imposed, the syllabi were prescribed, and the language teachers were expected to meet the goals of the institution. All these elements reinforced the control that teachers had over classroom activities. And that control seemed to hinder acquisition since students were not given enough opportunities to manipulate the language. It would hence be necessary for policymakers along with teachers to review the goals of language teaching and provide learners with enough flexibility to work with the language.

The second suggestion concerns the teachers' questions. Teachers seemed to restrict students' interaction with the language through the type of questions they ask. They often asked display and closed questions which did not allow learners to think critically and express their viewpoints. Teachers should be encouraged to resort to referential questions that put learners at the center of their learning and encourage them to dig up their vocabulary to express their opinions.

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